

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER

Ages 11 – 16 years old

Ecclesiastes

Lesson #1: Is Everything Meaningless?

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To give students an overview of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes
2. To assert that life is meaningless apart from God
3. To challenge students to place their faith in Jesus, the only One who can make life meaningful

Topics:

Faith, Fearing God, Happiness, Wisdom, Worthiness

Scripture Memorization

Ecclesiastes 1:2

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (10 minutes)

Wise Sayings (Activity)

Have each student come up with their favorite "wise saying." They can use a quote they've heard from someone else or something they invent on the spot. Have each student share his or her wise saying with the group while everyone votes on which one is the wisest saying.

If you have a large number of students, split up into smaller groups of 5 to 10 and have the members of each group vote for the wisest saying in their group. Then, let each group winner repeat their saying to the entire class, and vote for the wisest saying of all.

Give the winner a pack of Smarties for a prize.

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

General Discussion:

- Where do we get wise sayings?
- What makes something wise or not?
- How can wisdom help us in life?

We're going to start a study of a book of wisdom, Ecclesiastes, today. Before we do, we probably should know a thing or two about its author, Solomon.

DIGGING IN (30 minutes)

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Read 1 Kings 3:5-15

Discussion Questions:

1. If God asked you the same question He asks Solomon, how would you answer? (*Fame, riches, etc.*)
2. For what purpose did Solomon ask for wisdom? (*So that he might rule well.*)
3. What condition does God place on His blessing to Solomon in verse 14? (*He would have a long life if he kept God's commands.*)

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

The meaning of "Under the Sun"

It is important that we understand the phrase "under the sun" in Ecclesiastes. We will see it a lot. Anytime you read this phrase think "apart from God." The phrase in Hebrew meant something that was not plainly stated. Kind of like when we say, "the whole enchilada," we mean "everything." Or when we say, "go all out" we mean try our best. So, "under the sun" means "apart from God."

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Solomon identify himself at the beginning of the book? (*As the teacher, son of David, and the King of Jerusalem.*)
2. According to Solomon, what is meaningless? (*Everything.*)
3. According to verses 10-11, is there anything new on earth? (*No.*)
4. If that was true 3,000 years ago, do you think it is still true today? (*Certainly.*)

Wait a minute. There are new things. There was a time when there was no way to record music. Now, we can play back recorded music on iPods, CD players, and over radio waves. There used to be a time when there was no medicine that could fight cancer. Now there are many of cancer-fighting strategies.

5. What do you think Solomon means when he says there is nothing new? Do you think he means inventions and stuff? What could he mean? (*Allow for answers.*)

Solomon is talking about the ways of the world, the heart of man, and the repetition of nature, etc. In a way, new inventions are not really that new. They just improve upon things that we could already do.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Solomon's mood sound here in this passage? (*Kind of depressed and discouraged.*)
2. What did his wisdom bring him, according to verse 18? (*Sorrow and grief.*)
3. This pursuit of knowledge Solomon calls, "Chasing after the wind." What do you think that means? (*It is meaningless; you can never catch the wind.*)

Optional (Object Talk)

Choose a volunteer who believes he or she is good at catching things. Give the volunteer a baseball glove to wear for dramatic effect. Then, plug in a fan and have the volunteer attempt to catch the wind. Use this as a visual demonstration of when Solomon says, "You can't catch the wind." You always come up empty.

In Ecclesiastes 1, Solomon makes a simple point: Knowledge, wealth, and life is meaningless apart from God.

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MAKING IT REAL (20 minutes)

So, if everything in this life is meaningless apart from God, how can life have meaning? The answer is at the end of Ecclesiastes, which we will jump to right now, and periodically during this series.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:13

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Solomon, what is the conclusion to all that has been heard? (*To fear God and keep His commandments.*)
2. Based on what we read earlier from Ecclesiastes 1, what should everything else be considered? (*Meaningless.*)
3. There is a powerful question we must all confront with this in mind--are you living a life that is rich in meaning, or one that has no meaning?

All anyone really wants is for life to mean *something*. But are you willing to do what it takes to make it so?

Workbook Activity (10 minutes)

What Does Your Life Mean?

Part 1 (My 10 Most Important Things)

Have the students write down in their workbooks or on a sheet of paper the 10 most important things in their life. Some common things will be God, family, church activities, friends, etc. However, they will probably include some things that are more personal, such as music, dancing, sports, video games, etc. Encourage everyone to be honest and then to prioritize their list 1 to 10 in order of importance. Allow about 5 minutes to complete this portion of the activity.

Part 2 (How I Spend My Time)

Then, in the next section, or on another sheet of paper, ask the students to list the 10 things they spend most of their time doing. Again, have them prioritize their list 1 to 10 in order of time spent. A good chunk will be devoted to sleeping, school, hanging out with friends, etc. Allow about 5 minutes to complete this portion of the activity.

Ask everyone to compare his or her two lists. Then, conclude with the following questions:

- On which item did you spend the most amount of time?
- On which item did you spend the least amount of time?
- How does how much time we spend on something indicate what priority that has for us?
- Where is God on each list? If you put Him high on your priority list but He is low on your time list, how much do you really fear Him?

This does not mean that you should only have one thing on each list: God. However, we do need to think about how fearing God and obeying His commandments can be the foundation for everything on our list and everything in our life.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can loving God be a part of your friendships?
2. How can fearing God be a part of your life at school?

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3. How does obeying God's commandments affect the way you treat your family?
4. Being honest with yourself, is there anything on your list that you would need to eliminate if you were to take Ecclesiastes 12:13 to heart? If so, what?
5. If everything that is absent of the presence of God is meaningless, why do you think we spend so much time on those things?

So, we can conclude from this lesson that loving God and obeying His commandments are the only things that really matter. With this in mind, we all probably have some repenting and changing to do.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 minutes)

Have the students pair up with a partner and spend some time praying for each other. Then, suggest they set up a time during the week to check in on one another to ask how things are going.

Ecclesiastes

Lesson #2: The Pursuit

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To further the students' knowledge of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes
2. To expose the lie that chasing after worldly riches and power is satisfying
3. To help students love life by seeking God first and not pursuing too much of a good thing

Topics:

Contentment, Greed, Happiness, Joy, Treasures, Trust, Wisdom, Worldliness

Scripture Memorization

Ecclesiastes 2:11

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (12 minutes)

Too Much! (Activity)

Ask for two volunteers and take them away from the group. Give them the following assignment: Come up with something that if you just have a little bit, it is okay, but if you have too much, it is not okay. Maybe it is someone who drinks too much caffeine, or someone who puts too much gel in his or her hair. Perhaps it is someone who spends too much time working out. The job of the volunteer is to act that out before the class.

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Then have them come back to the group and act out whatever they chose and have the group members try to guess what they do too much of.

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

General Discussion:

- Were the things we saw acted out just now wrong? *(No)*
- How do these things become bad things? *(How much they are done/used.)*
- What are some other good things that people make harmful? *(There are lots--sex, money, self-esteem, freedom, etc.)*

DIGGING IN (25 minutes)

Read the following passages:

Ecclesiastes 2:1-3

Ecclesiastes 2:4-6

Ecclesiastes 2:7-9

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some things that Solomon lists that he tried in life? *(Partying, drinking, building stuff, toys, hobbies, interests, women, etc.)*
2. What conclusion did he reach about investing his life in these things (see verse 11)? *(It was all meaningless.)*
3. What is an item on Solomon's list that is the most appealing to you: having fun, having stuff, accomplishing stuff, or the opposite sex? *(Allow for answers.)*
4. How might investing in that stuff prove to be a waste in your own life? *(Allow for discussion.)*
5. Are any of these things in and of themselves bad or wrong? Why or why not? *(No. Allow for discussion.)*
6. What makes them a waste of time? *(By placing too high a value on them, making them the point of your life.)*

We all know people who walk around trying to fulfill themselves without God or with different idols in place of God. If we are honest with ourselves, we may even be someone who tries to do this. Verse 10 says that Solomon took "delight" in pursuing these things. However, he quickly found out that these things were neither fulfilling nor purposeful.

Again, Solomon uses the phrase, "under the sun." We have to ask the question: What point is there to life without God?

Read Ecclesiastes 2:17-26

Discussion Questions:

1. What was Solomon's reaction to investing so heavily in these things, according to verse 17? *(He hated life.)*
2. What do verses 24-25 say about pleasure? *(That it is okay as long as it is from the hand of God.)*
3. Is it wrong to love life, have fun, or to try new things? Why or why not? *(Of course not. Allow for discussion.)*
4. What should our foundation be for life? We talked about it last week. See verse 12:13, if necessary. *(Loving God, obeying His commandments.)*

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Christians, above all other people, should be able to enjoy life and appreciate the things that God has given them. Nevertheless, we should not be weighed down by trying to succeed in this world or get to the top. Instead, we should seek God and appreciate the things He has given us.

MAKING IT REAL (20 minutes)

God wants us to live our lives seeking Him. He will fill our very deepest needs and desires in ways that other stuff, people, and activities never can. When we desire the world, we will only be satisfied to the extent that the world is able to fulfill us. This leads to emptiness and despair. However, when we trust in God, we are rewarded with true joy and pleasure.

Read the following passages:

Matthew 6:19-21 (*store up treasures in Heaven*)

Philippians 4:11-13 (*be content whatever the circumstance*)

Hebrews 13:5-6 (*do not love money*)

Matthew 6:33 (*seek God first*)

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Matthew 6:19-21 say about storing up our treasures? (*We should store them up in Heaven, not on earth.*)
2. How is this different from what Solomon tried? (*He accumulated wealth.*)
3. What does Philippians 4:11-13 say about being content with our lives? (*That we should be content no matter what our circumstances are.*)
4. How does chasing after stuff defy this attitude? (*We are always striving for more: money, power, relationships, etc.*)
5. What does Hebrews 13:5-6 say about loving money? (*We should not do it. Instead, we should be content.*)
6. In your own words, describe how the world loves money. (*Going into debt for stuff, etc.*)
7. According to Matthew 6:33, what happens when we seek God first? (*Other things fall into place.*)

God is not in Heaven setting rules for us to follow so that we have no fun or enjoyment in this lifetime. There is nothing wrong with money, sex, relationships, or accomplishment. However, we can have too much of a good thing. When we put our trust in these things, when we try to pile up these things, we lose sight of what is really important.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 minutes)

Pray for your students to seek God first and trust Him to take care of the rest.

Ecclesiastes

Lesson #3: There is No Time

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

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1. To further the students' knowledge of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes
2. To help students feel the urgency that their time is not unlimited
3. To challenge students to commit to using their time on earth wisely

Topics:

Availability, Choices, Fruitfulness, Laziness, Priorities

Scripture Memorization

Ecclesiastes 3:1

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (12 minutes)

How Much Time? (Game) [Click here](#)

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

Imagine you received \$10,080 at the beginning of every week deposited for you into your bank account from a rich relative's trust fund. Every Sunday morning it goes in, and every Saturday night at 11:59:59, the account is emptied to \$0, whether you've spent it all or not.

General Discussion:

- What would you do with the money?
- Do you think you would spend it all? Remember, it doesn't carry over to the next week.
- What would be the smartest use of that money?
- The most foolish use?

Well guess what? You do get 10,080 of something every week, and it doesn't carry over. However, it is not dollars--it is minutes. And you choose how to use them every time the big hand takes a lap around the clock. The question for today is whether or not you are spending those moments wisely or foolishly

DIGGING IN (20 minutes)

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think Solomon is saying here? (*That there is a time for everything.*)
2. Do any of the "times" the Bible talks about seem wrong all of the time? (*Dying, tearing down, weeping, etc.*)
3. What attitude could make these situations all right? (*Trusting in God no matter what, etc.*)
4. Do you think Solomon makes a judgment about the right or wrong of these things, or does he observe that in our world there are times for the good and the bad?
5. Why do you think God allows "bad" things like death and war?

There is obviously a time for everything. In our lives, there is a time for us to do or experience all sorts of things. For instance, many of you will experience what it is like to support a family financially. But it's not time for that right now. There's a time where many of you will experience the birth of your own child. But it's not time for you to experience that right now. Here is an important truth I don't want you to miss: when we follow God's timing, things turn out beautifully.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11

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Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think it means for something to be beautiful "in its time"?
2. What happens when things happen outside of the time God might have intended for them? (*Frustration, disappointment, strained relationships, etc.*)
3. How do you know when it is time for a certain thing in your life?
4. What about when things happen not in their time, but when they are outside of your control?

MAKING IT REAL (15 minutes)

(Use a kitchen timer to indicate each minute that passes by during the reading and discussion period in this section. Set the timer for one minute, and, after each minute is up, reset the timer for another minute. You can also use a timer on a cell phone if you don't have an old kitchen timer available.)

In this chapter, Solomon says something we need to hone in on here. To make a point, we will use this timer to mark off each minute of time we spend. Remember that every minute you have is one that you should use wisely. The audible "ding" will be an experiential tool to reinforce today's lesson.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:12

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the verse say are the two things humans should do with their time? (*Be happy and do good.*)
2. What does this mean to you?
3. What do you think "doing good" means in our world today?
4. Think of the time you have (it's 1,440 minutes a day, just 60 minutes an hour). What percentage of that do you think you spend doing good?
5. Every time a minute goes by, you are either cashing in on that time or wasting it. If you're honest, are you wasting more than you are using wisely?

Optional Activity (10 minutes)

(Split the students into groups of two or three and have them share their answers to the following questions with the group. These questions are also in the workbooks. After about five minutes, suggest they take about two more minutes to pray for each other.)

Discussion Questions:

- Are you currently following God's timing in your life?
- Are you using the minutes of your day wisely?
- Share one thing with your partner(s) that you think you need to change.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 minutes)

Pray that your students will use their time wisely for the Lord.

Ecclesiastes

Lesson #4: Standing Alone

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LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To further the students' knowledge of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes
2. To help students understand that life is more meaningful when it is lived with good friends
3. To challenge students to commit to making their friendships more meaningful

Topics:

Fellowship, Friendship, Relationships

Scripture Memorization

Ecclesiastes 4:12

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (15 minutes)

The New Friend Game (Game) [Click here](#)

GETTING STARTED (10 minutes)

General Discussion:

- What is great about having friends?
- What can be hard about friendship?
- What do you think life would be like if you had no friends or anyone to count on?

We're going to be talking about the benefit of friendship and the difficulty of trying to live alone, but first, we want to do a little imagining.

Stranded for Seven

Let's all imagine we are on a deserted island—stranded all alone. There is fresh water on the island and--fortunately--a phone with a direct line to a rescue helicopter. Unfortunately, there are so many other people stranded on deserted islands all over the world, it is going to take seven days for the helicopter to come and get you. Now, suppose beforehand, you were able to grab three things to take with you. Only three things besides the clothes on your back. You selected these three things because they would help the most in keeping you alive. Everyone think about this for a while. Okay, now let's answer a few questions.

General Discussion Questions:

1. What three things would you bring, and why?
2. How do you think you would feel after day one? Day two? Day three? Day Seven?
3. What would be the hardest part about being alone for that long?

Now, everyone turn to Ecclesiastes 4 and let's start digging in.

DIGGING IN (15 minutes)

Read Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

Discussion Questions:

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1. What group of people does Solomon mention in this passage? (*The oppressed.*)
2. Solomon says those who are dead are happier than those who are alive. What do you think that means? (*That the world is a sad place to live.*)
3. According to verse 3, who is the most fortunate group? (*Those who have not been born.*)
4. Why do you think Solomon is so upset by the oppression he saw?

Solomon now shifts gears and talks about the opposite of the oppressed--the wealthy.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:4-8

Discussion Questions:

1. What is better according to Solomon, one handful or two? (*One*)
2. Why do you think people chase more, bigger, and better?
3. Does it surprise you that this was true even back in Solomon's day?
4. Do you believe that stuff can make you happy? Why/why not?

After talking about those who are oppressed and those who are wealthy, Solomon seemingly changes the subject.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Discussion Questions:

1. In verse 9, why is it better for people to work together? (*Because they have a good return for their labor.*)
2. Why is it better for one who falls not to be alone? (*They will have someone to pick him or her up.*)
3. Why is better to lie down with another? (*You keep warm.*)
4. Solomon ties together sections on oppression and wealth by talking about how much we need each other. How do they relate? (*It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, living alone is meaningless. We need each other!*)

MAKING IT REAL (15 minutes)

Strong Together (Object Talk)

Get four volunteers to come forward. Three of the volunteers will be together, one will stand-alone. Have the lone person claim a piece of the room and stand strong. The other three will then try to move that one person off balance.

Then, reverse the activity. Have the three stand strong on claimed territory. Ask the one to try to move the group of three. It will obviously be more difficult.

Discussion Questions:

- Was it hard for the one to stand strong on their own? Why?
- Was it hard for the group of three to stand strong? Why?
- What is the definition of a "true friend?" (*Someone who listens, hangs out with, talks to, has stuff in common with, is trustworthy, etc.*)

Solomon mentions some of those same things, doesn't he? You gain a profit together (not just money. Think of all the ways friends make life more profitable), you help each other out when one is feeling down, you keep each other "warm" and safe during life's tough times.

Let's read something else Solomon said about friends.

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Read Proverbs 17:17 and Proverbs 18:24

Discussion Questions:

1. What does a friend do at all times? (*Loves*)
2. Does this mean that they always get along, never confront, or give you the easy way out? (*No, sometimes love is tough love.*)
3. Solomon says friends are for what kind of time? (*Hard times.*)
4. What happens to those with unreliable friends? (*They come to ruin.*)
5. By contrast, what kind of friend should we strive to have? (*Those who stick closer than a brother.*)

So having friends isn't just about having stuff in common or hanging out, is it? It's much deeper than that.

If you are wondering how to be a good friend, think about the things we've just talked about:

Friends are there in difficult times.

Friends think about what they can do for others.

Friends are those who keep you accountable to commitments

Friends keep you strong

Friends warn you of danger

Friends are loyal

Friends make you better, not worse.

Solomon sees the importance of having true friends that we can count on. I challenge you to BE a true friend to someone and to SEEK OUT true friends for yourself.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 minutes)

Have students pray for a friend they have hurt, been hurt by, or to find a friend they can trust.

Ecclesiastes

Lesson #5: You Can't Take it With You

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To further the students' knowledge of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes
2. To challenge students to think about how important their stuff is to them
3. To challenge students to find joy in Christ, not wealth

Topics:

Contentment, Envy, Greed, Happiness, Idols, Joy

Scripture Memorization

Luke 16:13

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OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (10 minutes)

Money Hungry (Game) [Click here](#)

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

General Discussion:

- How important is money to you?
- Is it wrong to want more money?
- Do you think money is a good motivator?

The truth is, we are convinced that having more money is always better. Today, we are going to talk about money, and how our view of money might be pulling us away from God.

Now, everyone turn to Ecclesiastes 5 and let's dig in.

DIGGING IN (20 minutes)

Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Discussion Questions:

1. What is Solomon talking about when he says "the house of God"? (*The temple—the center of Jewish worship in the Old Testament.*)
2. What is his advice for those going to worship? (*To listen rather than speak, do not be hasty, etc.*)
3. Why do you think "let your words be few" is good advice for us all?

Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-17

Discussion Questions:

1. What is Solomon's view of riches? (*They are meaningless.*)
2. How is it that the richest man on earth could come to this conclusion? (*He had everything, but was still unfulfilled.*)
3. Re-read verse 10. Do you know anyone like this?
4. Why does wealth never bring complete satisfaction? (*Because it cannot save, it comes and goes, etc.*)
5. In verses 10-15, Solomon names some of the "traps" that loving money can cause you to fall into. What are some of those traps?
 - addiction/dissatisfaction (verse 10)
 - attracts the greedy (verse 11)
 - becomes a status symbol/trophy (verse 11)
 - promotes worry (verse 12)
 - causes lack of sleep (verse 12)
 - results in hoarding/stockpiling for self (verse 13)
 - can be lost easily (verse 14)
 - sure to disappear at death (verse 15)

Read Matthew 19:16-26

Discussion Questions:

1. How hard do you think it is for a rich man to enter Heaven? (*According to Jesus, it is very hard.*)

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2. What are some ways that you can ensure that your money never becomes your master? (*By being generous, don't think of it as "yours", etc.*)

Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 & 6:1-2

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Solomon observe to be a good thing? (*Working hard and enjoying life.*)
2. Verse 5:19 includes a gift from God. What is it? (*Having wealth and being able to enjoy it, not worrying and fussing to accumulate more and more.*)
3. The beginning of chapter 6 reveals a point of great misery to Solomon. What is it? (*Having wealth but being unsatisfied and unable to enjoy it.*)

MAKING IT REAL (15 minutes)

Favorite Possessions (Activity)

Make a list of the group's favorite possessions or things they would LIKE to have. Write each of them on the board or a large sheet of paper where everyone can see.

Then, go through the list one by one. Circle the ones that can make it to Heaven.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there something inherently wrong with having wealth or possessions? (*No.*) Explain.
2. Then, what makes wealth and stuff sinful? (*Loving them, trusting them, etc.*)
3. If you own something but it will cease to be yours after this world ends, how important is that something? (*Not very.*)

Read Luke 16:13

If it's true, you can't serve God and things at the same time, then the question we're left with today is this:

Who or what are you serving?

Think about your search for happiness. Do you try to find it by giving in to the desires of the world? Do you live as if the pursuit of money will bring you true happiness? Focus your attention today to the Spirit and what the Spirit desires.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 minutes)

Close by praying that your students will find joy in Christ and not run after the desires of the world.

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Ecclesiastes

Lesson #6: The Wise & The Foolish

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To further the students' knowledge of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes
2. To help students understand the difference between living wisely and foolishly
3. To inspire students to have wisdom beyond their years

Topics:

Foolishness, Wisdom

Scripture Memorization

Ecclesiastes 7:5

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (15 minutes)

The Choice is Yours (Activity)

(Have the students get together in small groups of two or three. You will present three dilemmas for each person to ponder with the others in their group. Have the students defend their choices. They may not all agree and that is okay. This is meant to get them thinking. The following three dilemmas are also shown in the lesson workbooks.)

Dilemmas:

1. You inherit \$100,000 from a distant uncle you never knew. What do you do with the money? The choice is yours.
2. A friend tells you a secret that might get him or her into trouble if others knew. What do you do? The choice is yours.
3. You witness someone stealing someone else's purse in a crowded shopping center. How do you react? The choice is yours.

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

General Discussion:

- How do you know if a decision is a good one or not?

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- Who can you get advice from to make sure you are making a good choice?
- How can making a difficult decision show your character?

DIGGING IN (25 minutes)

Ecclesiastes 6 and 7 have a variety of statements in them that swing on a common hinge--the back and forth of foolish and wise living. Some refer to something wise, others to something foolish. Each observation Solomon makes says something to us today.

No one thinks he or she is a fool, but so many of us do not live according to wise principles.

By taking a look at different chunks of these two chapters, we will all have a better idea of how to live wisely.

(Group the students into twos or threes, and assign each group one or more of the following passages. Then have each group share their answers to the three discussion questions as they pertain to their assigned scriptures. Allow each group about five minutes to read their scriptures and discuss their thoughts, and another two minutes or so to share their answers.)

Ecclesiastes 6:1-6

Ecclesiastes 6:7-9

Ecclesiastes 6:10-12

Ecclesiastes 7:1-4

Ecclesiastes 7:5-9

Ecclesiastes 7:10-14

Ecclesiastes 7:15-20

Ecclesiastes 7:21-29

Discussion Questions:

1. What do these scriptures say is foolish? (*Roving appetite, extortion, anger, devious schemes.*)
2. What do these scriptures say is wise? (*A good name, patience, knowledge, avoiding extremes, fear God.*)
3. How might you apply these verses to your life today?

The Scriptures are old. Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes about 1,000 years before the birth of Christ, but they still matter and apply to us today!

MAKING IT REAL (15 minutes)

General Discussion:

- Who is the wisest person you know?
- Why do you consider that person wise?
- Does that person have only good things happen to him or her? How does he or she handle tough times?
- How do you think that person became wise?

There is a difference between living a wise or a foolish life. Our lives are like a coin. We can land on one of two sides--the wise side or the foolish side. And plenty of people are living foolishly.

Two-sided Coin (Object Talk)

(Pass out a coin to every person in your group. Ask them to flip their coin repeatedly, noting each time whether or

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not it falls on “heads” or “tails.” As they are flipping, say the following.)

As I said, our lives are a two-sided coin. Sometimes we act wisely. Other times we are foolish. But there is a difference between our lives and these coins. The coins are landing on heads or tails at random. Nothing you can do will change it.

Discussion Questions:

1. Can you control whether or not you make wise choices? How? *(Yes. Base your decisions on Biblical principals)*
2. What is a foolish choice you have made recently? Tell it to your partner right now.
3. Once you make a foolish mistake, what can you do to avoid making that same mistake again? *(Ask God for forgiveness, wisdom, and strength not to repeat the behaviour. Be accountable to Christian friends.)*
4. Who are some wise people that you trust to hold you accountable to living wisely? Will you commit to asking them to help you sometime this week?

The time to live a wise life is not 20 years from now. It’s right now. By making wise choices, paying attention, and seeking to honor God with your whole life, you can live a wise life.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 minutes)

Go back to your partners and have some prayer time. Pray for each other to make wise choices.

Ecclesiastes

Lesson #7: It's Not Fair!

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To further the students' knowledge of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes
2. To help students understand that things in this life will not always seem fair
3. To motivate students to please God and await the justice of the next life

Topics:

Fairness, Judgment of God, Justice

Scripture Memorization

Ecclesiastes 9:4

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

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GROUP BUILDING (5 minutes)

Chug (Game)

Ask for two volunteers (one boy and one girl) to compete for a designated prize. The goal is to see who can chug down a coke or other soft drink the fastest.

The boy tries first. The trick is, you give the boy a 20-ounce bottle and tell him to go to town as you time how long it takes. Then, after finishing and recording the time, you give the girl a smaller version of the soft drink (8 or 12-ounce can) and timed. Even if the girl still loses the contest, you make the point. It was not FAIR to give them different responsibilities for the same ultimate reward.

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

General Discussion:

- Was the game fair? Why or why not?
- What would have made the game fair?
- Is life fair? Why or why not?

Today we are going to discuss "fairness" and what Ecclesiastes has to say about how we should approach life. Is everyone ready?

DIGGING IN (20 minutes)

Read Ecclesiastes 8:1-8

Discussion Questions:

1. What is someone's attitude toward the king supposed to be? (*One of obedience.*)
2. Whoever obeys the king will come to what end? (*They will be done no harm.*)
3. This advice, and the verses around it, all speak about wisdom. How do wickedness and a lack of wisdom go hand-in-hand? (*The wise seek God and follow His commands; the wicked go their own way.*)

Often, we do not understand what God's Will means for our future. We like to question it. However, when we know His Will, we should follow even if we do not understand the full purpose.

If we give up during the battle, that does not take us out of danger. We do not escape danger by joining the enemy, either. We must remember that we are in battle. Our duty as Christians is to follow what our Commander tells us. He sits on a high hill and sees the whole picture. He wants what is best for us.

Object Talk:

(Optional: Shine a flashlight right in front of you. It will be obvious to the group that it lights your way. Now shine it off in the distance. Chances are it will be much fainter.)

God often does not show what He is doing with us a long way down the path. He knows we could not handle it all. Instead, He shows us what we NEED to know and can handle. His goal for us is to be obedient in following what He calls us to do right NOW. Like a flashlight, we can only see the path in front of us, not down the way. However, if we do not step where the flashlight is shining, we increase our chances of getting hurt.

Read Ecclesiastes 8:9-17

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Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever looked at someone who wasn't honoring God and wondered why he or she seemed to have it so well?
2. Solomon says, "The wicked get what the righteous deserve and the righteous get what the wicked deserve." Have you ever seen this happen? Can anyone give an example? (*A cheater makes 100% on a test and someone who studies makes a C, etc.*)
3. There is an attitude that is prevalent today. It goes, "If I can get away with it, I can do it." Do you know anyone who thinks this way? How is this attitude a bad one? (*Just because you can get away with it doesn't mean it is right.*)

Solomon's point here is that we all live in a fallen, unfair world. Sometimes the wicked do seem to prosper. Nevertheless, this should not cause us to falter in our faith. Instead, the servant of God should look for the enduring approval of the Lord.

It's just like the king mentioned in the early verses. If we live to please the King, no harm will ultimately come to us.

4. Solomon mentions long life. Is long life a result of how you live on this earth? (*No.*) Explain.

In Solomon's day, God revealed very little about the life to come. Long life is not necessarily living longer on this world. As we know, we are simply visitors to this world (I Peter 2:11). Through Christ, we know that in the future we will have a reward that is much bigger than earth. The day of the wicked does not last longer than their time on earth.

MAKING IT REAL (25 minutes)

Even knowing this, many people have a problem with the way things work in our world. For example, many people have a problem with evil. How can God let things happen the way he does? It is difficult for us to understand sometimes how God works. Solomon's explanation is that God has made life unpredictable on purpose to keep us from trying to take it over and control it (verses 16-17). We are reminded that everything is in God's hands, not ours. This is how chapter 9 begins.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:1-4

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the "certain thing" that awaits the righteous and the wicked? (*Death and judgment.*)
2. Why is a "live dog better than a dead lion," based on these verses? (*While we are still living, we have hope. Once dead, our destiny and fate are sealed.*)
3. When you think about the life after this one, how different will it be? (*Lots of differences, but one big difference is that the injustice of this world will disappear.*)

Activity (15 minutes)

I Find it Unfair!

Bring out some newspapers, magazines, or have students look up news websites on their phones. Have them look for stories that are "unfair." For example, an elderly woman who loses her house in a tornado, a man wrongly convicted of a crime, or a rich person who hoards their wealth and wins a prize while the generous are ignored. Allow a few minutes to find something that is "unfair." Then ask the following questions:

General Discussion:

- How do stories like this make you feel?
- How do you think they make God feel?
- Why doesn't God choose to judge these people in this life? (*God is patient, not wanting anyone to*

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perish, and instead would like everyone to repent of their sins.)

- When we are all judged, how do you think some people will be surprised?

We live in a sinful and fallen world. Often, things that happen seem difficult to us. However, God is good. He often blesses us through our surrounding tragedies. Our goal is to please the Master and keep up hope through the tragedies that surround us.

This life is unfair, but what happens after this life is final--and it is just.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 minutes)

Ecclesiastes

Lesson #8: Fear God

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To further the students' knowledge of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes
2. To expose students to the difference between wise and foolish living
3. To inspire students to put God first in their lives

Topics:

Fearing God, Foolishness, Wisdom

Scripture Memorization

Ecclesiastes 12:13

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (10 minutes)

Allow time for your students to share their fears. Also, don't be afraid to share some of your own fears with the class. Chances are some in your group will have fears in common. Some might be strange or funny. Encourage as many students as possible to participate in the discussion.

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

General Discussion:

- Is fear a bad thing or a good thing?
- How can fear be a good thing?

Today we're going to finish our study of Ecclesiastes by talking about wisdom, foolishness, and fearing God. Let's get to it!

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DIGGING IN (35 minutes)

Read Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

In chapter 10, Solomon compares wisdom and folly in numerous ways.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to verse 1, what outweighs wisdom? (*Folly*)
2. Do fools always lose according to verse 6? (*No, sometimes they are in high positions.*)
3. Why do you think Solomon spends so much time comparing the wise and foolish? (*He was trying to figure out the meaning of life.*)

One of the reasons is that chapter 10 is followed by chapter 11, and he is about to give some advice that the wise person will embrace.

Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important to remember God while you are young? (*If you forget God while young it is easy for your heart to become hardened to the things of God over time.*)
2. What are some of the obstacles in your pursuit of God now?

Some people try to turn this passage in the end of this book into an excuse to live anyway one chooses and simply live a selfish life. However, the teacher points out in verse nine our responsibility to God.

3. How do the teacher's words in verse 9 relate to the judgment of those actions?

Solomon obviously believes in following your desires and seeking happiness during this life. However, he does not forget the importance of keeping God in the center. The reminder that we will be judged keeps us from frugally throwing away the youth of our lives.

Read Colossians 3:8-14

Now let's turn to chapter 12 as we finish up the book of Ecclesiastes.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

Solomon's metaphor section is a description of how we are basically wasting away. The days of youth are short-lived.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why would Solomon feel the need to warn young people about staying close to the Lord?
2. Why would he bring up how brief youthfulness is?
3. Can you think of someone who was dominant when they were young but lost that dominance with age?

Young people often feel indestructible and think that their youthfulness will last forever. However, we know that this is not true. Solomon thought it was important to help keep people from making the same mistakes in their youth that he made.

Many people live their youthful lives doing whatever they feel like doing without considering God and the consequences, and end up paying for it later. When confronted about doing something that a person knows is wrong, I have often heard responses like, "you have to live while you are young" or

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"this is just for fun for right now." The painful part is that many of the consequences that people bring on themselves during high school, college, or young adulthood stay with them the rest of their lives.

I bet that Solomon was living a life plagued by painful consequences that he had given himself during his youth. Think about it. He was young, rich, handsome (son of David and Bathsheba, I think you can assume that), powerful, and "unstoppable." Ultimately, Solomon's downfall was himself. He finally recognized that even though other people might not be able to touch him, he was destroying his own life.

His warning to us is that we do not get to our old age and have to say, "I wish I had that to do over again." The often-used Latin phrase: "Carpe Diem" is probably overused, but is a great rule to live by. If we can truly "Seize the Day" every day of our lives, we will never look back on things and think, "if I only would have acted differently."

God truly wants the best years of our lives. The main way to have true fulfillment in life is not to fill life with useless and meaningless things. Instead, we need to recognize Christ's importance in our lives and keep Him first.

Read Matthew 6:33

Discussion Question:

1. How does this verse relate to Solomon's message? (*To be truly happy, live a life that pleases God.*)

Perhaps this should be the theme verse for all of us--especially while we are young.

MAKING IT REAL (15 minutes)

Solomon, like every good writer, finishes his work with a brief summary. Silencing all of the critics that think the teacher says that life is worthless, Solomon gives the true meaning of life: fear God and keep His commandments.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean for us today to "fear God"? (*Recognizing the power and position of God and giving Him proper respect.*)
2. How does keeping His commandments demonstrate our love of God? (*We want to please those whom we love.*)

Even though Solomon dealt so much with the mortality and ignorance of man, his conclusion is that humanity is truly made up of one thing: its dependence on God.

In Genesis 2-3, humanity tried to become like God by disobeying Him. Instead, they lost the one thing that made them truly human. We are made to need and depend on God. If you try to live your life without Him, you will end up nowhere. Life is made with a God-shaped hole in the middle.

Object Talk (5 minutes)

Important Things Come First

Have a clear pitcher, rocks, gravel, sand, and water handy. Put the rocks into the pitcher first, so that the pitcher appears full. Explain that although it appears full, other things can still fit into the pitcher. Add the gravel. Again, suggest that it looks full, but it is not. Then add the sand, and ask everyone if it is finally completely full. Reveal that is not by adding water. The water will seep in around the rocks, gravel, and sand.

Explain that if you were to start this activity in reverse order, there would be no room for the rocks. Adding only one

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rock would cause some of the water to overflow.

Just like this, our lives need God in them first. If you don't put Him in your life first, at the root, your life will hold little value and you will never reach true peace and fulfillment.

Adapted from the story told by Stephen Covey in his book "First Things First."

Let's learn from Solomon--through his mistakes and his wisdom.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 minutes)